



Communication Considerations for Working with Organic and Alternative Livestock Clients

Continuing education series for veterinarians, veterinary technicians, extension, and other animal health professionals

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Learning objectives

- Discuss the importance of communication in achieving goals within the VPCR with organic and alternative clients.
- Compare and contrast paternalistic and relationship-centered communication styles.
- Describe what communication skills are and how they can impact your relationship with your clients.
- Demonstrate communication skills with organic and alternative clients.



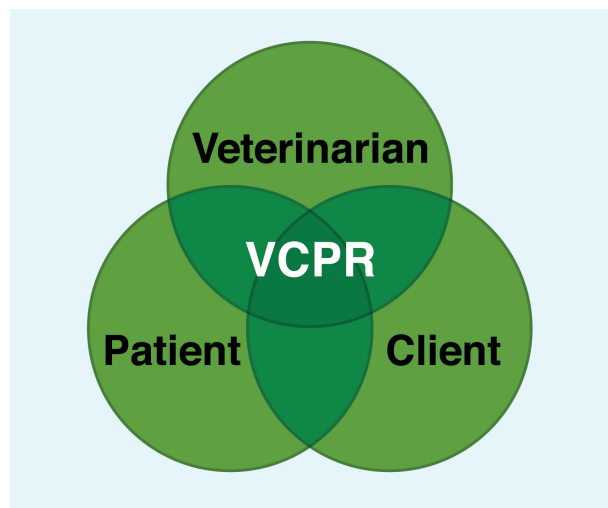
Introduction – the importance of communication

As social creatures, humans communicate daily. Despite the frequency of communication, many don't consider the importance of how they communicate, especially while they are in it. Often, people say what they think or what comes to mind. Yet, that is only part of the art of communication. Did they consider how others would interpret what was

said? Was eye contact made? Were they multi-tasking while talking? Did they consider the tone of their voice? Learning how to convey messages thoughtfully, especially important ones related to health and well-being, is essential to the message being received, respected, and understood.

Expanding veterinary practice to include organic and alternative (O/A) clients requires attention and dedication to clear and effective communication. As a minority among farmers, their decisions, choices, and opinions are compared to the traditional majority. As a result, O/A farmers often feel unheard, misunderstood, and dismissed and may react defensively when working with people outside their farms, including veterinarians. When communicating with all clients, particularly O/A clients, consider this dynamic and remember that they are experienced and knowledgeable about THEIR FARM. This belief in client knowledge is crucial in gaining trust and forming a good working relationship. This conscious consideration also plays heavily into relationship-centered communication within the Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR), which will be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

Veterinarians are famously persistent, resilient, and dedicated to improving their ability to help animals and the veterinary profession. In recent years, research on the human-animal bond has increased, revealing many health and social benefits linked to the relationships between humans and animals. Veterinarians are in the unique position of having to work with both animals and clients simultaneously, and as such, engage in the human-to-human bond as well (Dr. Morgan McArthur @avmavets). To positively impact animal health and have successful working relationships with clients, veterinarians need to consider the bonds between all three points of VCPR.



The three parts of communicating an idea are the content, the process, and the interpretation. An easy metaphor for these parts in action is the idea of passing a ball. The content is the ball (soccer ball, football, baseball, etc.), the process is how the ball was passed (fast, with a spin, a lob, with your feet, etc.), and the interpretation is how the individual on the other end receives it (catch, fumble, complete miss). The outcome of the interaction depends on understanding each piece of it and is influenced by the perceptions of the involved parties. In metaphorical terms – if someone tries to pass a soccer ball with a baseball bat, the individual on the receiving end likely won't understand what they are trying to do. Similarly, if someone passes a basketball to someone who has never played basketball (which would affect their interpretation), they may not know how to receive it. For clear communication, everyone must be on the same playing field or be working on getting there.

Veterinarians are familiar with the VCPR as it is an integral part of their jobs, and communication is vital to that relationship. Forming a working relationship with O/A clients is like forming one with a conventional client. The key difference is that veterinarians might be less familiar with the rules, regulations, philosophies, and practices associated with their way of farming. Being open-minded, respectful, and willing to learn will go a long way in developing a strong working relationship with O/A clients.

Good Communication is Linked to Positive Outcomes

Humans have been using various ways to communicate for hundreds of thousands of years, from cave drawings, gestures, texts, and symbols, to spoken languages. Along the way, there has been growing awareness of the influence that communication has on outcomes in medical fields, and there are several areas where effective communication has been shown to have a significant impact.

Better Client Satisfaction

Client satisfaction and the likelihood of returning to the same practice increase with effective communication from the veterinarian. Clients report interpersonal skills, such as being kind and gentle, along with being respectful and informative, as some of the most important factors in choosing their veterinarian (Shaw et al., 2004). Communication styles that emphasize the doctor or veterinarian's dominance in the interaction or relationship have been negatively associated with client satisfaction (Shaw et al., 2004). A social climate of positive verbal and nonverbal behavior, partnership building, friendly emotional environment, etc., in a



medical practice was also cited as a major factor contributing to client satisfaction (Shaw et al., 2004). This may be relevant to O/A clients. They may have different experiences than conventional farm clients and may have different perceptions of the norm of a situation. Paying more attention to this and being open-minded will likely greatly improve their satisfaction with your services and go a long way in fostering a strong working relationship with them.

Increased Adherence to Recommendations

Clear communication results in increased adherence to veterinary recommendations. As with client satisfaction, more studies exist in human medicine, but the concepts are translational and relatable to veterinary medicine and the VCPR. Topics that routinely influence adherence to recommendations are patient/client education, doctor expression of empathy and encouragement, and an active role for the patient/client in the interaction (Shaw et al., 2004). Communication factors in veterinary medicine that have resulted in increased adherence to recommendations include establishing 2-way communication, building trusting relationships, and collaborative planning (Shaw et al., 2004). This chapter will expand on ways to enhance and highlight these skills when working with O/A clients and other working and personal relationships.

Improved Animal Health Outcomes

Health outcomes for animals are better with improved communication. This likely relates to increased adherence to veterinary recommendations and improved understanding of the diagnosis, treatment, and recommended preventative practices by the client. Many randomized, controlled trials and analytical studies in human medicine have shown the significance of improved health outcomes with improved communication (Shaw et al., 2004). While specific veterinary data in this area is not as robust, hypotheses and initial studies support this same conclusion within the VCPR.

Reduced Malpractice Claims and Board Complaints

Deficiencies in communication skills have been routinely linked to malpractice claims and complaints to state veterinary medical boards. In the US, most of these are due to poor communication and interpersonal skills (Shaw et al., 2004). With clients more likely to pursue retribution following what they perceive as poor communication, it is important to continue to develop these skills and assume them as a responsibility and core clinical skill in the veterinary profession.

Increased Veterinarian Satisfaction

Veterinarians have many draws on their attention in catering to client and animal needs. Veterinarians are a vital part of the VCPR, and parts that negatively or positively affect them, and their ability to help others, are important to recognize. Fortunately, veterinarian satisfaction is linked to building client relationships (Shaw et al., 2004). A common thread for many in the veterinary profession is the personal fulfillment of helping others. Thus, working on better connections with clients benefits the client, the patient, and the veterinarian.



1. Communication styles

Background

Paternalistic style

Historically paternalism was the most used communication style in medicine. In a paternalistic approach, one individual (for our purposes, the doctor) dominates the medical encounter. They collect information, form a plan, and tell the client what should be done. This approach focuses heavily on the knowledge, perceptions, and decisions of the provider/veterinarian/doctor. Whether intentional or not, paternalistic communication may emphasize behaviors that display the physician's power, status, authority, and professional distance (Shaw et al., 2004). Patient satisfaction has been negatively associated with these behaviors.



Unfortunately, this approach does not leave room for input or collaboration from the client. This style can further ostracize people and lead to feeling brushed off, unconsidered, and undervalued. Imagine a veterinarian working up a patient and being told by another veterinarian to do it differently. Whether the suggestion was helpful or not, approaching a problem in a paternalistic way leaves little room for collaboration and understanding. Remember there are reasons O/A clients farm as they do, and they know those reasons better than the veterinarian. A paternalistic style is unlikely to result in a strong working relationship with O/A clients as it creates separation and negative feelings between clients and veterinarians.

The following scenario will be used throughout the rest of the chapter to describe, show, and highlight key factors in communication styles and techniques:

Scenario – Part 1

Farmer Jane is an organic dairy sheep farmer with 100 milking ewes, two mature rams, 220 yearlings, and five ram-lambs. She does not routinely vaccinate her herd and emphasized that her practice of optimizing animal health focuses on managed rotational grazing, good genetics, and stress-free handling. Her farm recently experienced a few late term abortions. You sent samples to a diagnostic lab that came back positive for *Campylobacter fetus* (vibriosis). Your plan for this herd would include disease prevention changes (separation, quarantine, isolation, removal, and proper disposal of affected tissues, cleaning and disinfecting, etc.) and starting a vaccination schedule. You know that *Campylobacter fetus* is a zoonotic disease and will also discuss zoonotic disease transmission and that she should talk to her doctor for more information regarding her health and *Campylobacter spp.* Communicating this in a paternalistic way could sound like this:



Jane, your sheep have been diagnosed with vibrio, a disease that can cause abortions, stillbirths, and weak kids, and more. To fix this, you need to separate the sick animals, remove all tissues, clean the areas thoroughly, and vaccinate the flock. Vibrio is a zoonotic disease, so talk to your doctor too.



Oh, that's a lot to take in. Was there something I did that caused this?



Well, this disease can be routinely vaccinated for and is strongly recommended. Our office has the vaccine and can supply it for you.



Okay. Are you saying my animals must have this vaccine?



Yes. Vaccinating sheep for vibrio is a common practice.



Okay. And I can't let my ewes eat their placenta? That seems unnatural.



Their placenta could spread disease; it must be removed and disposed of properly.

This is a simplified scenario – but take a minute to think about the following questions:

- How do you think Jane will respond to the recommendations?
- Are you missing out on an opportunity to learn more about Jane and her farm?
- Could more information improve the outcomes for everyone, including the animals in this situation?
- Think about the goals for this conversation and farm. Is this an effective way to communicate them?
- Do you think Farmer Jane feels considered?

The veterinarian may give medically correct information, but by approaching the conversation in a paternalistic way, the veterinarian did not provide an opportunity or comfortable conversational environment for Jane to express her feelings or concerns. In this situation, does the veterinarian understand Jane's reasons for vaccine non-use or

concerns about the placenta? Losing that interaction and collaboration can negatively affect Jane's likelihood of following the vet's recommendation and thus negatively affect the animals involved. In addition, Jane may not feel this veterinarian can help her or her livestock.

Relationship-centered style

Relationship-centered communication has become the more predominant and preferred method of communication by clients and veterinarians in recent years. This communication style focuses on animal care being a joint venture between the veterinarian and the client. Decisions are made by combining biomedical knowledge from the veterinarian with the lifestyle and social factors of the client.

This approach can help create lasting working relationships with O/A clients. O/A clients often indicate veterinary collaboration and communication as a factor of major importance in their decision to work with a veterinarian ((Steneroden, 2021).). Moreover, they request a desire for their veterinarians to respect the knowledge of O/A farmers regarding O/A practices and treatments.

Scenario – Part 2

Now let's revisit the Farmer Jane scenario

A relationship-centered approach to the previously described scenario would consider not just vibrio's medical facts and requirements on a sheep farm but would also seek to incorporate some of the "why's" and "how's" involved in managing animal care. For example, why does Farmer Jane specifically ask about the placenta? Or what are the reasons Farmer Jane does not routinely vaccinate? Some issues are more complex than can be explained in this chapter, but veterinarians can't be sure of the underlying concerns unless they ask when it comes to client decisions. They cannot assume their motives or reasons. Communication in a relationship-centered approach with Farmer Jane might sound like this:



Jane, your sheep have been diagnosed with vibrio. Vibrio is a disease that can cause abortions, stillbirths, and weak kids, among other things. Some things to fix this may include separating the sick animals, removing all tissues, cleaning the areas thoroughly, and vaccinating your herd. In addition, vibrio is a disease that humans can get from animals or handling animal tissues that have vibrio. Some of the items I described can help prevent you from getting the disease. However, you should also speak with your doctor for more information on vibrio in humans.



Oh, that's a lot to take in. Was there something I did that caused this?



Vibrio is a contagious disease that can come from a few sources, and we can look into what may have been the initial source on your farm. Routine vaccination helps lessen and control diseases like this. Can you share your thoughts on vaccinating your sheep and your past decisions to vaccinate or not?



Okay, looking into that would be helpful. I feel awful my animals are sick. I don't have a strong stance on vaccinating, I just live so far out here, and I've never had this problem before, so I figured I didn't need to.



No one wants their animals to be sick, and I hear your concern. We will do our best to get them healthy again. And I understand you do live a way out and being separate from other herds certainly helps keep diseases out. Unfortunately, there are still opportunities for disease to enter a farm, such as through interactions with wildlife, or they can be brought onto a farm on clothing or equipment. We can discuss more options to decrease these chances, but some are out of our control or nearly impossible to control. That is one of the reasons why I find vaccines can help prevent and control diseases. If vaccinating your sheep is something you want to do, we can create a vaccine plan together that fits your farm.



Okay, that makes sense to me. And I can't let my ewes eat their placenta? That seems unnatural.



Vibrio infects reproductive tissues, so the placenta is likely contaminated and could cause the disease to spread if they or other animals come into contact with it. To prevent more animals from getting sick, placentas should be removed and disposed of them properly. However, may I ask why you think removing the placenta is unnatural?



Well, I don't want any more of my animals getting sick, but the placenta has so many nutrients, and I don't want to deprive my animals of receiving those. Besides, that is natural for them to do after giving birth. So, I feel like that would be cruel or unnatural to interfere with.



Thank you for sharing that. I hear your worry about being unnatural. I don't want to tell you to do anything that you feel would be cruel, unnatural, or not right, but I want to work with you to help get your animals healthy. Unfortunately, these placentas are very likely to cause other animals to get sick. Let's continue thinking through some options that are less risky but just as rewarding.

Take a minute to re-think the following questions

- How do you think Jane will respond to the recommendations?
- Did the veterinarian learn more about Jane and her farm in this situation?
- Could more information improve the outcomes for everyone, including the animals in this situation?
- Think about your goals for this conversation and farm. Is this an effective way to communicate them?
- Do you think Farmer Jane feels more considered and included in this approach?

The veterinarian is still medically correct in this second version of the scenario. However, approaching the conversation in a relationship-centered way prompted Jane to express her feelings and concerns more. In this situation, the veterinarian took the time to learn why Jane was not vaccinating her flock and her concerns about the placenta. As a result, the veterinarian may work with Jane to make some changes to improve her animals' health. This style helps provide client empowerment, which can positively affect Jane's likelihood to follow the vet's recommendation and thus positively affect the animal's involvement. In addition, Jane may be more likely to feel that this veterinarian can help her and her farm. Using a relationship-centered style is not about coercion, manipulation, or persuasion – but about working together – the goal might be a change of perspective for both the client and veterinarian, not a change of values.

Relationship-centered communication encourages collaboration and fosters a group approach toward resolving issues. Moreover, collaborative communication has been associated with positively changed client knowledge and initial beliefs about medications, client satisfaction with medication, and client use of prescribed/recommended medications (SHAW). This style is important and useful for working with O/A clients or groups with various beliefs or goals to improve understanding and increase satisfaction for all parties involved. It is more likely to result in positive change and positive feelings associated with the interaction. There is no one-size-fits-all, and no one should expect the veterinarian to have all the answers. However, it is in the veterinarian's best interest to work with all differences in opinions and beliefs. Clients learn from veterinarians, and veterinarians learn from clients. A team approach through relationship-centered communication fosters using the knowledge and skills of both parties. Staying open-minded in this process is good for personal and professional development and business, as this can be attractive to new clients and helpful in maintaining a good reputation.

Situational needs for different styles

There is no one-size fits all style that applies to every conversation. Effective communication depends on situational needs and should be considerate of social factors and influences. Extenuating circumstances may influence which communication style is most effective in each situation.

Relationship-centered communication is the preferred communication style for veterinarian-client interactions. Under some circumstances, such as natural disasters, foreign animal diseases, animal health emergencies, or urgent animal

welfare situations, time may not allow for the usual back-and-forth conversations of relationship-centered communication, and more direct action may be necessary.

Brief descriptions of risk communication and conflict resolution follow. Specific communication practices under emergency/disaster situations are beyond the scope of this article. However, engaging and working with those involved is part of the process, even in high-risk emergencies.

Risk communication

Risk analysis is an assessment process that identifies the potential for adverse events and is used by businesses, universities, governments, etc., to prepare for adverse events. Risk communication, an element of risk analysis, is an interactive process where risk information is openly exchanged with the involved parties and includes an explanation of risk findings and decisions. Risk communication is an open, two-way exchange of information and opinion about the risk, leading to better understanding of all involved. Good risk communication builds support and empowers those involved to make informed decisions about the risk they are facing. For a risk communicator, the goal is to translate the information into understandable language and tailor it to the audience; self-efficacy is fostered by giving those at-risk appropriate actions to lessen the risk. Best risk communication practices include assessing, involving, and listening to the audience.

Suggested risk communication resources for additional reading are located at the following centers:

- [Iowa State University Center for Food Security and Public Health](#)
- [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#)

2. Types of Communication



Verbal

Verbal communication may seem obvious enough as the use of words to convey a point. But it is worth mentioning that successful verbal communication is heavily influenced by word choice. Veterinarians have been taught to avoid medical jargon when speaking with clients. This is a common example of how word choice can influence understanding in a verbal conversation (spoken or written). How words are presented also influences the effectiveness of the message.

In the previous scenario with Farmer Jane, the veterinarian discusses some potential disease transmission sources and concepts. Consider the effectiveness of the message communicated using the wording of option 1 (which was used in the scenario) versus option 2.

1) Unfortunately, there are still opportunities for disease to enter a farm, such as through interactions with wildlife, or they can be brought onto a farm on clothing or equipment.

2) Unfortunately, there are still opportunities for pathogens to enter a facility, such as through interactions with wildlife or fomites.

These two statements reference a similar message, but because of these differences in wording, they might not be interpreted the same way. Using medical jargon can lead to misunderstanding by the client as technical terms can sometimes be as foreign as a different language. In addition, this language can sometimes come across as patronizing or dismissive, which can decrease the receptiveness of the receiver to the message. Thus, changing the verbal content of a message can impact the way it is received and affect the interpreted message.

Nonverbal

Nonverbal communication is all the communication that occurs without using words and includes body language, paralanguage (pitch, speaking speed, intonation, etc.), spatial relationships, and autonomic responses. Despite those last ones being mostly out of our control, they still matter and can influence communication effectiveness. Nonverbal communication is how most communication is carried out, so the changes in our facial expressions that may be subconsciously made can have a huge impact on a conversation, interpretation, and relationship.

Nonverbal communication, as body language, manifests in facial expressions, gestures, position, tension, and touch. Consider how various emotions, feelings, and thoughts are displayed with facial expressions – there is the obvious smile or frown, but even frustration, sadness, surprise, confusion, dismissal, and acceptance can be detected by slight changes in facial expression. Accompanying gestures and body position can also emphasize one's intent. Are their hands folded across their body, closing them off? Are they leaning forward or away?

Now think about how various parts of paralanguage, such as voice tone, rate, rhythm, emphasis, and volume, can further change the interpretation and understanding of a communicated message. Examples referencing our scenario with Farmer Jane are below:

Example 1

Listen to the following sentence:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://cardinal.cfsph.iastate.edu/communication-organic-alternative-animal-health/?p=86#audio-86-1>

Vibrio is a disease that infects reproductive tissues, so the placenta is likely contaminated and could cause the disease to spread if they or other animals come into contact with it.

Example 2

Listen to the following sentence:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://cardinal.cfsph.iastate.edu/communication-organic-alternative-animal-health/?p=86#audio-86-2>

Vibrio is a disease that infects reproductive tissues, so the placenta is likely contaminated and could cause the disease to spread if they or other animals come into contact with it.

Example 3

Listen to the following sentence:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://cardinal.cfsph.iastate.edu/communication-organic-alternative-animal-health/?p=86#audio-86-3>

Vibrio is a disease that infects reproductive tissues, so the placenta is likely contaminated and could cause the disease to spread if they or other animals come into contact with it.

A loud tone and volume can make a message sound assertive or angry. Breaks in speaking, mental fillers like ahh's and um's or changing of the rate or speech may indicate consideration of word choice or could be interpreted as grasping for straws and lacking knowledge (Amick et al., 2017).

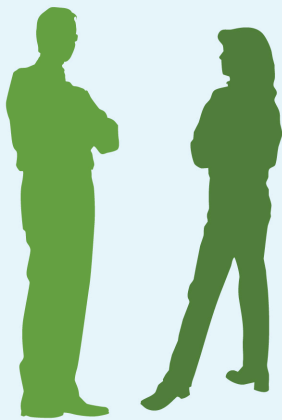
In addition, the spatial positioning between the veterinarian and client can serve as a means of nonverbal communication. People who lack trust in others tend to put space between themselves and others. Barriers between individuals can serve as a means of guarding or protection, distance, etc. Pay attention to how you interact with your O/A clients – something as simple as moving to their side of a table or fence can indicate that you are on their side and act as a nonverbal demonstration of that concept.

Lastly, autonomic responses like flushing, blushing, tearing, sweating, changes in respiration or pupil size, and other nonvoluntary responses can also convey different meanings to your client. For example, sweating and facial flushing can be conveyed as signs of nervousness or lack of confidence. While they are difficult or impossible to control it is important to be aware of them

Moreover, it is important to be aware of how all these signs can influence communication of a message. Paying attention to these details can help you understand your client's feelings and help you effectively communicate with them.

For example – in our second version of our farmer Jane scenario, the vet asks. "Can you share your thoughts on vaccinating your sheep and your past decisions to vaccinate or not?"

Read that statement while looking at this graphic:



"Can you share your thoughts on vaccinating your sheep and your decisions to vaccinate or not in the past?"

Now read that same statement while looking at this graphic:



“Can you share your thoughts on vaccinating your sheep and your decisions to vaccinate or not in the past?”

Did you feel like the nonverbal indicators changed the message? For most, the graphic with open body language seems friendlier and conveys interest in learning. While the graphic with closed-off body language, such as the arms folded, seems disinterested and less welcoming.

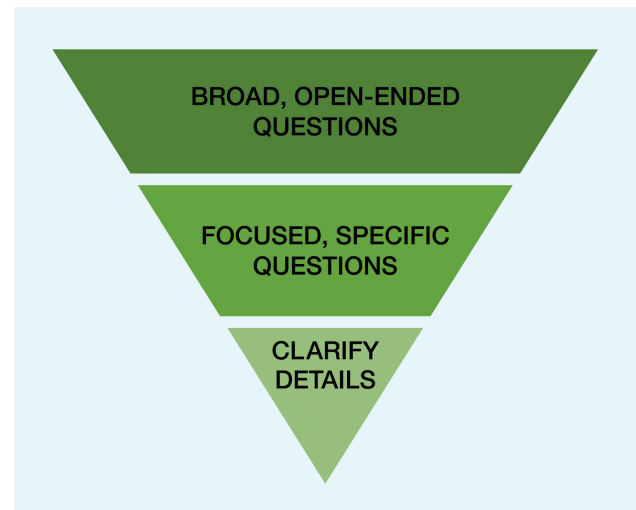
Combining verbal and nonverbal communication strengthens the message. It is important to both read the nonverbal cues from your client and to pay attention to how your nonverbal cues may affect any message you are trying to convey to your client.

3. Communication Skills

Now that we have discussed and covered various types of communication, let's work on combining those parts into effective communication skills.

Open Ended Questions

Open-ended questions are questions that encourage a person to elaborate on their response. Close-ended questions are answered with a short, direct response – usually one-word – such as yes or no. Open-ended questions result in more client feedback, increase their involvement, and help them feel more engaged. Thus, this style of questioning helps enforce relationship-centered communication, which, as previously discussed, leads to better outcomes for all parties involved. Open-ended questions also provide an opportunity for the client to express themselves. Creating this opportunity shows you value your client's observations, opinions, and knowledge. For an agriculture group routinely misunderstood, this is a phenomenal way to communicate that you want to work with them and value their insights.



Open-ended questions encourage sharing of details. Below are examples of how to form open-ended questions when communicating with O/A clients:

- "Tell me about ..."
- "What happened next..."
- "Share your thoughts..."
- "Describe what happened..."

The following table shows a few examples of questions phrased in an open and closed manner. You can see that the open-ended phrasing prompts a client to respond with more than a one- or two-word answer.

Closed Ended	Open Ended
Is your goat eating or drinking?	Can you describe what your goat is eating or drinking?
Have you given them anything?	What treatments have you tried?
Is there something wrong with your chickens?	Please explain what you think is wrong with your chickens.
Is your farm conventional or O/A?	Tell me about how you operate your farm.

Reflective listening

Reflective listening is performed by using your own words to tell the client what you heard and gathered from what they said. This skill shows your interest in the client and what they are communicating. It can help structure the conversation and provide an opportunity for the client to clarify any points or add information. There are three general styles for demonstrating reflective listening; echoing, paraphrasing, and summarizing.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://cardinal.cfsph.iastate.edu/communication-organic-alternative-animal-health/?p=88#h5p-4>

Additional listening tips include:

1. When someone is speaking, be fully present and in the moment with them
2. Put yourself in their shoes
3. Pick up key points and let the client know you heard what they said
4. Keep an open mind

Empathetic Statements

This communication skill is based on putting yourself in your client's shoes or trying to see things from their perspective. Using empathetic statements shows your clients you care and are trying to communicate with them in a supportive way. This can go a long way in building trust and long-term working relationships.

To expand upon this skill, try to name the emotion you sense from your client. Some examples of starting phrases are included below.

- "I see that..."
- "I am hearing that..."
- "I am feeling that..."
- "I sense that..."
- "It sounds like..."



In our second farmer Jane scenario, an example of an empathetic statement occurs when the veterinarian states, "I hear your worry about being cruel." In that scenario, the veterinarian indicated they could sense their client's concerns and was willing to appreciate their predicament and feelings. Communicating in this way shows care and support. The veterinarian could have improved in this scenario by adding an additional empathetic statement emphasizing their willingness and attempt to put themselves in farmer Jane's shoes. Something like "I can imagine it must be overwhelming to make these changes." Lastly, empathetic expressions and statements can be strengthened by nonverbal communication. For example, a gesture of an open hand reaching toward the client while communicating empathy can emphasize unity and camaraderie.

Conflict Resolution

The previous information will help prevent conflict. However, no one is perfect at communicating, and misunderstandings can and will occur. For those situations, these tips may help de-escalate confrontation and direct the interaction back towards a more productive one. Conflict resolution is how people resolve disagreements peacefully and effectively. It can be used in any difficult situation, from family disputes to workplace disagreements.

Conflict is part of life and dealing with others. Working to resolve conflicts reduces stress and improves relationships. The [5 C's](#) below provide tips when choosing a course of action to reduce conflict and improve connections.

1. **Be Clear.** When we get uncomfortable, it is easier to be vague and indirect, but that only leaves people wondering what is meant. Ignoring conflict and hoping it goes away is the opposite of being clear. Individuals are responsible for starting a conversation when something is not right with them.
2. **Be Concise.** Providing too much information, rambling, or moving from point to point is ineffective communication. Focus on the most important points and, if there is time, plan out what should be said. There is no need to tell a story or apologize for feelings.
3. **Be Curious.** One of the most overlooked tools when resolving conflict is the skill of curiosity. Asking another person to share their experience and perspective, actively listening, and asking questions shows value for the other person.
4. **Show Compassion.** Holding genuine concern for another's feelings, beliefs, well-being, and outcomes is a way to foster meaningful and deep connections and mutually supportive relationships.
5. **Collaborate** for the win. Creating a suitable vision together helps to pave a way forward that will result in positive and committed action. When all parties involved in the conflict feel heard and have contributed to the solution, there is a stronger commitment to the outcomes.

4. Key take-aways and resources

Key takeaways

Taking the time to work on communication skills can help improve interactions with organic and alternative clients and result in more rewarding work and relationships. Moreover, client satisfaction and the likelihood of returning to the same practice increase with effective communication from the veterinarian.

- Good communication improves animal health outcomes and client and veterinary satisfaction
- Listening and acknowledging client's concerns and feelings is essential to good communication and de-escalating conflict
- Be aware of body language and nonverbal communication in interactions with clients
- Using relationship-centered communication style encourages collaboration and fosters a group approach toward resolving issues and concerns on O/A farms and in general.

Additional resources

Communication in Veterinary Medicine

[AVMA Guides](#)

Conflict Resolution

[5 approaches to conflict resolution](#)

[5 C's of conflict communication](#)

[5 conflict resolution strategies](#)

Thank you!

Remember to return to the course home page to complete this chapter's quiz. After successfully passing the 5-question multiple-choice quiz, you can collect your Certificate of Completion to earn 1.0 RACE-approved CE credit.

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Glossary

ACA

Accredited Certification Agency

AGA

American Grassfed Association

alternative

when a non-mainstream approach is used in place of conventional medicine

AMDUCA

Animal Medicinal Drug Use Clarification Act of 1994

APHIS

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

ATTRA

Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas

AVMA

American Veterinary Medicine Association

CAVM

Complementary and Alternative Veterinary Medicine

CE

continuing education

CFSPH

Center for Food Security and Public Health

complementary

when a non-mainstream approach is used together with conventional medicine

CRP

Conservation Reserve Program

DMI

Dry Matter Intake

EPA

Environmental Protection Agency

EU

European Union

FAD

Foreign Animal Disease

FAMACHA

a system for estimating the level of barber's pole worm among small ruminants

FDA

Food and Drug Administration

G.I.

Gastrointestinal

GAP

Global Animal Partnership

GMO

Genetically Modified Organism

GMOs**integrative**

when conventional and complementary approaches are used together to care for the whole individual in a coordinated way

IOIA

International Organic Inspectors Association

Materials List

A list included in the Organic System Plan of each substance that might be used as a production input (e.g., fertilizers, health care products, feed).

NCAT

National Center for Appropriate Technology

NCCIH

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

NIH

National Institute of Health

NOP

United State Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program

NOSB

National Organic Standards Board

O/A

Organic and/or Alternative

OFPA

Organic Foods Production Act

OMRI

Organic Materials Review Institute

Organic Livestock

Certified by the USDA to carry the organic label

OSP

Organic System Plan

Permaculture

A system that develops agricultural systems modeled from natural ecosystems (per USDA).

plain community

Amish and conservative Mennonites

PMO

Pasteurized Milk Order

Regenerative agriculture

An alternative decision-making framework that offers a set of principles and practices to grow food in harmony with nature and heal the land from degradation (per NRDC).

Split operation

An operation that produces or handles both organic and nonorganic agricultural products (per USDA).

split operations

An operation that produces or handles both organic and nonorganic agricultural products (per USDA).

Sustainable agriculture

An integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long-term satisfy human needs, enhance environmental quality, make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources, sustain the economic viability of farm operations, and enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole (abbreviated per USDA).

USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

VCPR

Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship